

THE UNITED NATIONS: PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

KEY JUDGMENTS

The United Nations, despite the hopes of its champions and the fears of its detractors, does not greatly influence the basic trends and developments of world politics. Occasionally it illuminates international policy decisions; more often it merely reflects them.

*-Transition from Western to LDC Dominance:*

The UN was often a useful forum for the US during the years when East-West conflicts were the foremost public issues, because the outcome of votes reflected Washington's diplomatic strength and Moscow's isolation.

The UN is now a frequent source of embarrassment to the US, because world politics and the UN agenda are regularly dominated by North-South confrontations which feature attacks by the disgruntled majority of less developed countries (LDCs) against the US and other developed countries.

LDC dominance in the UN results not only from their surge in numbers and activity but also from the declining interest of the US and other developed countries.

The reverses the US encounters at the UN while recurrent are not cumulative. Their psychological and diplomatic impact has, in fact, been substantially reduced through repetition.

NOTE: This study was prepared by the Office of Political Research of the Central Intelligence Agency. Although the subject matter was discussed with representatives of other offices and agencies, no formal attempt at coordination has been undertaken. The views presented represent the best judgments of the issuing office, which is aware that the complex issues discussed lend themselves to other interpretations. For further information about this study, please call [REDACTED]

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*Residual Benefits:*

The UN does continue to provide diplomatic and technical benefits--ranging from peacekeeping operations to the functional services of intergovernmental agencies--which offset the liabilities of diplomatic embarrassment and psychological defeats.

Furthermore, by virtue of its parliamentary, global, and bureaucratic structure, the UN tends to delay and dilute LDC demands on the US and other powers.

*Alternatives:*

Just as the UN is not the essential source of US difficulties with the LDCs, changes in the US posture toward the UN are not likely to uncover solutions to those difficulties.

--If the US and the other major powers retreat still further from active involvement in the UN, the LDCs would probably shift their attacks to other arenas, where they would be less constrained.

--If instead the US and the major powers resumed their earlier, more active roles, a strengthened UN could better serve US interests in matters such as peacekeeping and technical services, but at the same time would likely increase the effectiveness of the LDC challenge.